

ABSTRACT

THESIS: Emerging Food Perceptions, Purchasing, Preparation, and Consumption Habits of Female Participants on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

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This study was conducted to examine the food perceptions, purchasing, preparation, and consumption behaviors of female SNAP participants in East Central Indiana. Twenty participants were interviewed, and interviews were transcribed and compiled in order to identify patterns. Participants were primarily white, had at least a high school education, were food-secure, and 85% were either overweight or obese. Results indicated that the participants interviewed in this study had limited opportunities to participate in food and nutrition education courses unless approached by community agencies. Participants indicated they purchased a large variety of healthy and unhealthy food items from a wide array of grocers. A portion of the participants participated in EFNEP courses (n=4), WIC education (n=7), or conducted self-research (n=9). These participants indicated they retained knowledge by participating in these methods of education. Although participants expressed the desire to exhibit healthy eating behaviors, such as examining food labels, they also indicated they did not understand how to utilize the information to make healthy

food choices. Results indicated all participants in SNAP would benefit from food and nutrition education courses that focus on SNAP benefit budgeting, meal planning that includes more fruits and vegetables, low-fat food items, and leaner cuts of meat, and physical activity. Practitioners and SNAP officials should be encouraged to coordinate efforts to make participants aware of educational opportunities in order to improve overall health outcomes.